

For Immediate Release

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Darien Church Seeks Judgment in Dispute with Connecticut Diocese

St. Paul's Church, Darien, is seeking the advice of the Connecticut Superior Court at Stamford, in a declaratory judgment action regarding the legitimacy of a trust that the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut claims it has regarding the Parish's Darien church grounds and assets.

In a recent letter to St. Paul's, the Rt. Rev. Ian T. Douglas, the Bishop of Connecticut, stated that St. Paul's property is being held in trust by the Diocese and the national Church, a reference to a church law known as the Dennis Canon. That canon law was not adopted until 1979 by the General Convention of the American Episcopal Church.

The filing in the Superior Court specifically seeks to know the details of the purported theocratic trust, in particular the identity of its beneficiaries, and whether it may be enforced since it is a violation of the doctrine of separation of church and state. The legal issue to be determined is whether a civil court should regard a religious document as taking precedence over a parish's legal deed when a theological dispute arises.

The issue brings into play the neutrality of the legal system in church matters, as well as the rights of parishioners as citizens, to determine their own course without government interference. The Parish contends that a theocratic trust cannot be enforced because to do so would violate the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and Article Seventh of the Connecticut Constitution.

St. Paul's, for its part, takes the position that it remains an "Episcopal Church in the Anglican Communion" as it has for 53 years. The Parish's legal request comes in the context of a worldwide dispute, in which most Anglicans and many Episcopalians in Communion with them, including St. Paul's Parish, have affirmed themselves to be in sharp and basic disagreement with the American Episcopal Church regarding issues of faith and morals. The divisions in the Communion are over the role of Christ in achieving salvation and recent actions which would compel acceptance of minority views on human sexuality and the use of churches for performing same sex marriages.

St. Paul's Church holds a distinctive place in the history of the American church as a harbinger of spiritual renewal in an era of mounting secularism. Detailing this role, was a 1980 book by Bob Slosser, titled *Miracle in Darien*.

The Parish now seeks to stay focused on its historic mission. It still desires to work in good faith with Bishop Douglas and any visitor designated by the Archbishop of Canterbury to help effect an amicable resolution of the legal issues.